

**Finding of No Significant Impact
for the
Environmental Assessment for the Ankeny Hill Nature Center
Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge, Marion County, Oregon
Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex**

The U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has completed an Environmental Assessment (EA) for the Ankeny Hill Nature Center (Nature Center) at Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge (NWR, Refuge) to evaluate effects on the human environment associated with designing, building, and operating an environmental education facility in partnership with Salem Audubon Society (Salem Audubon) and Friends of the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (Friends). No other environmental assessments or environmental impact statements are being prepared that are related to this proposed action. The purpose and need for the Nature Center is to increase the opportunities for environmental education and interpretation at the Refuge in Marion County, Oregon. The desire to increase these types of activities was discussed in the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex (WVNWRC), as described in Goal 10b and 10c (W. L. Finley, Baskett Slough, and Ankeny NWRs) (USFWS 2011).

Features Common to All Action Alternatives

The three action alternatives have many features in common: they are all designed to meet the same programmatic requirements for the Nature Center's uses and size, parking, and priority public use facilities. The driveway access off Ankeny Hill Road, south of Spring Creek, and the outdoor classroom at Peregrine Marsh, associated parking lot, and access off Buena Vista Road projected in phase 4 is the same in all alternatives due to traffic safety requirements. The Nature Center building is located on Ankeny Hill in the same general location for each alternative, due to the view of the Refuge, diversity of habitats, and existing infrastructure (e.g. parking lot, overlook, etc.). All action alternatives would provide year round public access for visitors in the 25 acre Nature Center area, including the associated trails.

Alternatives Considered

Alternative A (No Action): Under Alternative A, Ankeny NWR would continue existing public use opportunities without any change. There is currently no indoor public facilities at the Refuge and limited environmental education and interpretation opportunities at the Refuge and WVNWRC. There would be no development of the Nature Center, and the existing access and parking lot at Ankeny Hill overlook would remain in its current state. General public access would be limited to a kiosk at Eagle Marsh, two trails with boardwalks totaling 1 mile, and 10 pull-out access points off county roads during the wintering sanctuary period of October 1 through March 31. This alternative is the baseline to which the other three alternatives are evaluated.

Alternative B: Under Alternative B, our selected alternative, we would construct a Nature Center building, a new public entry access off Ankeny Hill Road., parking areas accessible to public transportation, walking trails with interpretive nodes, and an outdoor classroom. The Nature Center, operating as an environmental education and interpretation facility, would include approximately 3,550 square feet of indoor space, a 1,000-square-foot covered exterior classroom, and 350 square feet of exterior decks for viewing. The building would include indoor and outdoor classrooms,

interior and exterior restrooms, exhibit area, two offices, and a lunchroom/kitchenette. The building would be designed using wood frame construction and manufactured truss systems.

Alternative C: This alternative would result in the greatest amount of development (i.e., earth moving, robust building materials, highest cost) associated with the Nature Center building and the greatest level of required capital investment. The building floor plan is similar in size, but features a Low, uniform profile, not exceeding 14 feet in height, and would require excavation into the hillside with the building being approximately 5 feet below the grade of the parking lot and entry. The building would have a low, earthen roof with the option of native prairie plants occupying the roof. It would incorporate sawtooth photo-voltaic solar panels and meet the highest energy efficiency certifications, LEED Platinum. To achieve this the building would include more expensive building materials such as steel framing, concrete or stucco exterior, higher load bearing capacity for earthen roof, and increased design cost.

Alternative D: This alternative would result in the least amount of development (i.e., limited earth moving, pre-fabricated building materials, lowest cost) associated with the Nature Center building and the lowest level of required capital investment. This building would include standard steel pre-manufactured framing with concrete foundations, a 27-foot tall peaked gable, and corrugated steel siding. It would be pre-engineered and pre-fabricated offsite, with the lowest relative cost building materials and finished onsite.

Summary of Effects

Alternative A (No Action): Under the no-action alternative, there would be no change to the existing site. This alternative would not address the purpose and need for the action or the priority public uses of the Refuge System, and would not help fulfill operational goals of Ankeny NWR. The Refuge would continue to be managed primarily for wildlife and habitat resource values. The WVNWRRC would not realize the partnership potential associated with Salem Audubon and the funding contribution towards the mutual goals and objectives of the Service and Salem Audubon. There would be neutral or negligible effects to geology and soils, hydrology, priority public uses, land use, cultural resources, transportation, and economics. Ongoing and planned habitat restoration will have moderate beneficial effects on vegetation, fish, and wildlife.

Alternative B: This alternative could initially result in minor negative effects to soils and hydrology due to ground disturbance and development, although they would be minimized and temporary. This alternative would have moderate to major beneficial effects to priority public uses by providing the only indoor public environmental education and interpretation opportunities on the WVNWRRC and greatly increasing the quality of those opportunities. We project negligible effects to land use as most of the Refuge is either managed as native habitats or farmland and the 25 acre Nature Center area comprises 0.89% of the 2796 acre Refuge. Effects to cultural resources would be neutral because the project would avoid all cultural resources, meet compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, conduct surveys prior to earth moving activities, and incorporate local cultural resources into the educational and interpretive programming of the Nature Center. We expect minor to moderate beneficial effects to transportation as all action alternatives incorporate recommendations to move the existing access to preferred locations identified in the traffic study. Effects to economics would be moderately beneficial considering short-term benefits by expenditure of Salem Audubon and USFWS' capital investment in building construction and site

developments. Moreover, permanent long-term benefits would be expected from direct and indirect consumer expenditures associated with increased site visitation.

The availability and quality of wildlife-dependent recreation on the Refuge would have minor to moderate improvements under Alternative B, but within a regional context, the cumulative change would be small. Effects to socioeconomics at the regional scale are expected to be minor positive. Therefore, the effects of implementing Alternative B are not expected to have any significant beneficial or adverse effects on Refuge resources or other elements of the human environment.

Alternative C: This action would result in the most ground disturbance and earthmoving, although effects to soils and hydrology would still be minimized and temporary, and therefore minor. This action would have moderate to major beneficial effects to priority public uses by providing the only indoor public environmental education and interpretation opportunities on the WVNWRC and significantly increasing the quality of those opportunities. We project negligible effects to land use as most of the Refuge is either managed as native habitats or farmland and the 25 acre Nature Center area comprises 0.89% of the 2796 acre Refuge. Effects to cultural resources would be neutral because the project would avoid all cultural resources, meet compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, conduct surveys prior to earth moving activities, and incorporate local cultural resources into the educational and interpretive programming of the Nature Center. We expect minor to moderate beneficial effects to transportation as all action alternatives incorporate recommendations to move the existing access to preferred locations identified in the traffic study. Effects to economics would be moderately beneficial considering short-term benefits by expenditure of Salem Audubon and USFWS' capital investment in building construction and site developments. However, this building would exceed Salem Audubon's budget and scope. Moreover, permanent long-term benefits would be expected from direct and indirect consumer expenditures associated with increased site visitation.

Alternative D: This action would result in the least ground disturbance and earthmoving, although effects to soils and hydrology would still be short-term and minor. This action would have moderate to major beneficial effects to priority public uses by providing the only indoor public environmental education and interpretation opportunities on the WVNWRC and greatly increasing the quality of those opportunities. However, project partners felt this reduced cost building would not blend in well with the environment and setting, thereby reducing the environmental education and interpretive experience. We project negligible effects to land use as most of the Refuge is either managed as native habitats or farmland and the 25 acre Nature Center area comprises 0.89% of the 2796 acre Refuge. Effects to cultural resources would be neutral because the project would avoid all cultural resources, meet compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, conduct surveys prior to earth moving activities, and incorporate local cultural resources into the educational and interpretive programming of the Nature Center. We expect minor to moderate beneficial effects to transportation as all action alternatives incorporate recommendations to move the existing access to preferred locations identified in the traffic study. Effects to economics would be moderately beneficial due to direct and indirect consumer expenditures associated with increased site visitation.

Comparison of Overall Effects across Alternatives: Effects to the physical environment would be mostly neutral or slightly beneficial under Alternatives A, B and D, primarily due to relatively minimal earthwork associated with building construction. Regarding wildlife and habitats, action alternatives B, C, and D would have more beneficial effects than alternative A because it will incorporate community involvement and leverage additional resources in habitat work and instill broader environmental stewardship. All action alternatives (B-D) would have beneficial effects on transportation via improved ingress/egress safety and economics via increased visitation. Alternative B would be most beneficial from an economic standpoint because it best meets our partner, Salem Audubon's, budget and also from a cultural standpoint as it blends in well with the physical environment as well as the built environment that includes our rural residential neighbors to the north.

Decision

Based on our comprehensive review and analysis in the EA and input we received from the public comment process, we selected Alternative B for implementation, because it will increase the opportunities for environmental education and interpretation at the Refuge in a manner that:

- Achieves the mission of the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the purposes, vision, and goals of the Refuge.
- Achieves the mission of Salem Audubon and Friends by connecting people with nature and advocating for birds and wildlife habitat.
- Is consistent with objectives stated in the CCP, while also addressing goals and comments identified by project partners and the public.
- Facilitates priority public uses appropriate and compatible with the Refuge's purposes and the National Wildlife Refuge System mission, while adhering to a project scope and budget that commensurate with initial goals and objectives.

Summary of the Actions to be Implemented

Implementing the selected alternative will have no significant impacts on the environmental resources identified in the EA. Refuge management, under the selected alternative, will improve the public's opportunities to enjoy wildlife-dependent recreation, namely through enhanced environmental education and interpretation that the Nature Center will provide, while maintaining and enhancing habitat for wildlife and resources of concern. Key features of the actions to be implemented include:

- Develop a Nature Center in an incremental phased approach in partnership with Salem Audubon and Friends. In phase 1, Salem Audubon will contract for and fund final design and construction of a building that will house an indoor classroom, covered outdoor learning space, and restrooms. The Nature Center building and site developments will be based on the existing 30% schematic design.
- Subsequent phases (i.e. 2 and 3) will expand the building to its final configuration and complete other planned improvements in accordance with the availability of funding.
- Addition of a new access road off of Ankeny Hill Road, box culvert, and parking lots associated with the Nature Center at the Ankeny Hill overlook.

- Addition of a new access off Buena Vista road, parking lot, and outdoor classroom at Peregrine Marsh in phase 3.
- Approximately 25 acres of the Ankeny Hill management unit in the vicinity of the Nature Center would be open to public use during normal refuge hours (dawn to dusk) and not subject to seasonal closures.
- Addition of two new trails within the Ankeny Hill management unit: 1) an approximately 750-foot accessible gravel loop trail around the experience zone and 2) a longer (over ¾-mile) accessible gravel loop trail to Peregrine Marsh.
- Restoration of native habitats within the 25 acre portion of the Ankeny Hill management unit including wet and upland prairie, oak savanna and riparian habitats.

Public Involvement and Changes Made to the Selected Alternative Based on Comments

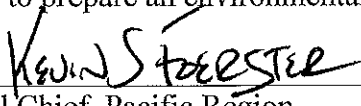
We incorporated a variety of public involvement techniques in developing and reviewing the EA. This included two open houses, several planning updates via websites and social media, meetings with partners, agencies, and Tribes, and public review and comment on the draft EA. The details of our public involvement process are described in the EA in Appendix A.

Based on the public comments we received and considered, Alternative B as described in the EA has been slightly modified.

- The proposed building and site developments will meet Silver Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) construction standards at minimum and we have clarified this minimum standard in the EA. We strive to use best energy and material practices and will contact Energy Trust of Oregon and Oregon Forest Resources Institute prior to design/build contractor solicitation for input and potential resources as recommended.
- Security cameras will be installed around the facilities to address security concerns and protect investment by the Service and partners.
- Two typos in the draft EA were addressed.

Conclusions

Based on review and evaluation of the information contained in the supporting references, I have determined that implementing Alternative B as the Ankeny Hill Nature Center project at Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge is not a major Federal action that would significantly affect the quality of the human environment within the meaning of section 102 (2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969. The proposed action is not without precedent and is not similar to actions that would normally require preparation of an environmental impact statement. Accordingly, we are not required to prepare an environmental impact statement.



Regional Chief, Pacific Region
National Wildlife Refuge System



Date

Supporting References

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2011. Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex Final Comprehensive Conservation Plan and Environmental Assessment.

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 2016. Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge Draft Environmental Assessment for Proposed Nature Center.

Note: This Finding of No Significant Impact and supporting references are available for public review at the Willamette Valley National Wildlife Refuge Complex, 26208 Finley Refuge Road, Corvallis, Oregon 97333 and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Division of Planning, Visitor Services, and Transportation, 911 NE 11th Avenue, Portland, Oregon 97232. These documents can also be found on the Internet at <http://pacific.fws.gov/planning/>. Interested and affected parties are being notified of our decision.